

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE A-1

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## U.S. Denies Role in Raid In Nicaragua

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White House spokesman Larry Speakes said yesterday that no U.S. government personnel were involved in Saturday's rebel attack in Nicaragua in which two Americans were killed when their helicopter was downed by Nicaraguan government forces.

An administration official traveling with President Reagan on a campaign swing through California said, "We had absolutely no association with this mission." Nicaragua said Sunday the helicopter and three airplanes had attacked a military training school 20 miles from the Honduran border.

The official, who declined to be named, described the two Americans as part of a group of seven U.S. citizens who had arrived in Honduras last week and "volunteered" to help U.S.-backed rebels in their fight to overthrow Nicaragua's ruling Sandinistas.

Nicaraguan Defense Minister Humberto Ortega said at a Managua press conference yesterday that the identification of the men as "volunteers" with no U.S. government ties was "a tale no one is going to believe." He called them "CIA mercenaries," special correspondent John Lantigua reported.

The men are believed to be the first Americans killed in Nicaragua since Reagan three years ago approved funding for a "secret war" against the Sandinistas. Although it is known that American intelligence personnel have been closely involved in training anti-Sandinista rebels and planning their missions, administration officials repeatedly have assured Congress that no U.S. personnel have been directly involved in the fighting.

Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan

(D-N.Y.), vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said yesterday that high-level CIA officials have told him on several occasions since the helicopter was shot down Saturday that the U.S. government was not involved "either indirectly or directly."

Reached by telephone yesterday in New York, Moynihan said a high-level CIA official told him there only "was a 2 percent possibility of a glitch," meaning that the U.S. might have been involved without the knowledge of top CIA officials. Moynihan said he told the official, "If there's been one, it's one hell of a glitch."

Neither the CIA nor the State Department has issued any detailed official statement about the incident, making Moynihan a principal public source of information. In announcing the deaths Saturday, the Sandinistas said three men were killed when the helicopter was shot down. They said they believed one of them was an American because of his height and light coloring.

But yesterday Ortega said that two of the three dead were Americans and cited Moynihan as his source. The Washington Post later was able to confirm that two of the men were U.S. citizens.

Moynihan said all of his information came from a ranking CIA official, whom he described as someone who "would have to know" what happened. But, he said, it was not clear from his conversations with the CIA official how the U.S. government knew that a group of "volunteers" had joined the rebels and why it did not do anything to stop them.

"That's a question that has to be answered," Moynihan said. He added that he believed the men had been recruited in New Orleans, possibly through Soldier of Fortune magazine, but he said that he did not believe they were recruited by the U.S. government.

Soldier of Fortune, a conservative Colorado-based publication that defines itself as a magazine for "pro-

fessional adventurers," has published a number of reports of participation by its reporters and subscribers in fighting in Central America.

The U.S. official traveling with Reagan said the Americans killed in the crash "had been discouraged" by leaders of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, known by its Spanish initials FDN, from undertaking the mission. But, he said, the main rebel leader, Adolfo Calero Portocarrero, was not in Central America when the Americans "talked the local *contra* [rebel] people into a mission involving a helicopter with these three people aboard."

NBC News reported that Calero, who is in Washington, said two men killed in the crash were Americans and were working for his organization.

Another spokesman for the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, the principal U.S.-backed rebel group, said in Tegucigalpa that the group will issue a statement today.

The State Department said yesterday that it was still "checking out" the report of the American deaths. It said the two dead Americans had not been identified. Meanwhile, Nicaraguan authorities issued a formal protest to U.S. officials and said they would deliver the bodies of the Americans to U.S. Embassy officials once the bodies are identified.

Congress has refused to continue funding the "secret war," and despite the continuation of fighting in Nicaragua both the Nicaraguan Democratic Force and the administration insist that the rebels have received no U.S. assistance since May.

"We still have some knowledge over what they are doing," the official said. "We don't have the kind of control and we are not able to exercise restraint as we would like to."

The official said there has been an increase in "well-meaning volunteers" offering their services. "So we have a situation of the *contras* continuing their activities with less control and less restraint," he added.

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